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AUTHOR Hilton, Alan
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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are offered for dealing with noncompliant behavior in severely handicapped students. Eight steps in developing interventions for such behaviors are listed, and three are dealt with in detail: defining noncompliance, establishing causes for non compliance, and providing a number of interventions for each cause. Noncompliance is viewed from the perspective of reinforcement. Causes are seen to include the seeking of attention, escape from demands, and boredom. The importance of identifying the type of noncompliance prior to intervention is emphasized, and suggestions are offered for ways to deal with attention seeking (such as using differential reinforcement of behavior), escape (including making the situation more enjoyable and teaching an acceptable way of not complying) and boredom (such as increasing difficulty and revising the program). (CL)

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Dealing Effectively With Non-Compliant Students

Alan Hilton, Ed.D.

Assistant Professor

Institute for Habilitative Services

Eastern Montana College

Billings, MT 59101-0298

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Running head: Non-Compliance

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Abstract

Students not complying with the requests of teachers and parents is a major problem which interfers with planning, assessment, and teaching. There are at least three causes of such non-compliance; attention, escape, and boredom. Although the manifestation of these forms of non-compliance are often similar the interventions to each are unique. The selection of an intervention inappropriate to one cause may strengthen the non-compliance if the behavior has a different cause. Data based criteria for selecting appropriate interventions are presented along with a brief discussion of several interventions suited for each of the causes of non-compliance.

Dealing Effectively With Non-Compliant Students

For both parents and professionals the "minding behavior" of severely handicapped individuals has become a critical concern (Haring, Liberty and White, 1981). This critical concern arises because non-compliant behavior affects learning, maintainence of skills and generalization of behavior in all settings (Poling, Nelson and Miller, 1977; Liberty and Wilcox, 1981). Non-compliance can block the successful implementation of individual programs and the effective transition of individuals from setting to setting as well as reducing the ability of that individual to ultimately function in society.

Non-compliant behavior can be expressed by the severely handicapped in a number of ways. These include the ignoring of the request made by the parent or professional (Haring, et. al., 1981), latency in responding to the point of not being acceptable (Fowler, Johnson, Whitman, and Zukotynski, 1978), and the performing of behaviors other than those requested. The latter group have been described at some length in the literature and include aggressive behavior (Carr, Newson and Binkoff, 1980), discrepant use of language (Volkmar and Siegel, 1978), persistant errors (Liberty and Wilcox, 1981), tantruming, (Mansdorf, 1977) and self-stiulatory activities (White, note 1). There is little question the non-compliant behavior exhibited by the severely handicapped is learned behavior (Liberty and Wilcox, 1981). From an operant conditioning standpoint, the environment

is structured in such a manner that non-compliance is more rewarding than compliance. Or, in other words, we as parents and professionals have trained the severely handicapped to be non-compliant and are continuing to strengthen that behavior.

The intervention to non-compliant behavior is no more difficult than other behavioral interventions, however, for the parent and/or professional to be successful an eight step procedure should be employed. That procedure includes the following components:

1. Establish that the behavior is non-compliance.
2. Determine the baseline.
3. Identify the cause of the non-compliance.
4. Establish a plan for intervention with a backup plan.
5. Get the plan approved by those involved with the non-compliant individual.
6. Institute the intervention.
7. Look for behavioral change from data.
8. Let those involved with the individual know about the outcome.

The remainder of this discussion will center around the first, third, and fourth components. This will include the defining of non-compliance, establishing causes for non-compliance and providing a number of interventions for each cause of non-compliance.

Defining Non-Compliance

Not all aberrant behavior is non-compliant behavior. In fact the majority of non-acceptable behavior is not non-compliance. Non-compliance has been defined as not minding or not following instruction which the teacher expects to be followed (Haring, et. al., 1981). However, the parent and/or professional must examine this failure to comply by asking two questions. First, can the non-minding individual perform the behavior requested? Clearly the failure of a non verbal child to respond orally is not non-compliance. Second, has the individual previously performed the behavior in response to the instruction as given? The individual who repeats his name in a form of delayed ecolalia is not non-compliant when he fails to respond when asked his name, for example.

There are three general manners of non-complying that help to define and clarify what non-compliance is. The first is by not responding to the request. The second is by performing another behavior than the one requested. This may include a variety of behaviors, from verbal to physical actions. And finally, failing to respond within an acceptable time frame. This latter form of non-compliance may take on aspects of both of the first two forms. The time frame involved would vary from request to request and from individual to individual.

The Role of Reinforcement

Prior to discussing the specific causes of non-compliance it is important to consider the role of reinforcement in this phenomenon.

Reinforcement refers to:

> "the presentation of a positive reinforcer or the removal of a negative reinforcer after a response which increases the frequency of that response (Craighead, Kazdin, and Mahoney, 1981, p117)."

Non-compliant behavior, no matter what form it takes or what the cause, is a result of the inability of those who deal directly with the non-compliant student. In other words our inability to control contingencies is directly related to the need to implement interventions for non-compliance. Too often reinforcement is viewed as the use of edibiles, i.e. "M & M's", selected by an adult rather than from a data based decision processes in which the individual student determines what is reinforcing. This latter approach allows reinforcement to take any form that increases behavior.

Non-compliance should be addressed from the reinforcement standpoint when it first appears. If the teacher or parent is unable to control reinforcing events or modify the environment to eliminate non-compliance then it becomes necessary to institute some form of intervention as discussed later in this paper.

Causes of Non-Compliance

Non-compliance exhibited by the severely handicapped population has three distinct causes. These general causes are the seeking of

attention, the attempt to escape from the demands being made and boredom. Each of these causes may lead to an individual exhibiting any of the range of possible behaviors, however, the interventions used for each are quite unsuited for application to the other causes. In fact, the use of interventions for attention on escape behavior will build the behavior not lessen it. The same is true for the reverse. Each of the causes for non-compliance is unique when viewed by the knowledgeable observer and when data is reviewed.

Attention

The exhibition of attention seeking behavior is well recognized and interventions have been discussed at length in the behavioral literature. The concept attention seeking as a cause for non-compliance can be explained in operant terms. Basically, non-compliance results from an environment that is structured in such a manner that it is more rewarding to be non-compliant than it is to be compliant (Poling, et. al., 1977).

It is critical to identify attention seeking behavior as opposed to other causes of non-compliance. The key to this type of non-compliance is that it occurs across situations. Figure 1 graphically demonstrates how attention seeking non-compliance data would appear.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The non-compliant behavior (no response, hits, tantruming, running, etc.) continues over demand and non demand situations at a relatively even incidence.

Escape

Non-compliance caused by the wish to escape must be recognized as a vastly different phenomenon than attention seeking non-compliance. The non-compliance in escape behavior is related to the desire of the client to escape demand situations.

Figure 2 represents graphically how data would appear in cases of escape behavior.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

In this case of escape behavior the non-compliant behavior is significantly higher when demand is placed upon the client and in non demand situations the exhibited behavior is non-existent or limited.

Boredom

Non-compliant behavior caused by boredom is often more difficult to recognize than the other cause of non-compliance. This is because

non-compliance caused by boredom is often manifested in instructional performance. The level of correct responses is greatly varied from session to session. Figure 3 represents what data may look like when the non-compliance is boredom oriented.

Insert Figure 3 About Here

By looking at correct responses in a graphic manner a pattern of variability is quite apparent. Another indicator is the decrease of correct performance from a high to a relatively low level. Figure 4 demonstrates this type of data.

Insert Figure 4 About Here

Interventions to Non-Compliant Behavior

It is critical to identify the type of non-compliance prior to selecting an intervention. The type of non-compliance then dictates the form of intervention and as noted the incorrect interventions can actually strengthen or build rather than lessen an individual's non-compliance.

Attention Interventions

After non-compliant behavior has been established to be caused by attention seeking behavior a number of evaluations should be instituted. The first, and often most critical is analysis of the setting to determine whether a predominately positive environment exists. In other words, are individuals being rewarded for being on task, complying and producing or do more than 25 percent of the interactions relate to negative behaviors. If the latter is the case then changes in the overall management system are indicated.

From the overall management system an analysis of interactions that the non-compliant individuals' interactions with others should be completed. It may be that simple ignoring of the behavior will eliminate the non-compliance. There are a number of well known and commonly used interventions which are available. This includes differential reinforcement of other behavior, time out, positive practice and response cost techniques. For a discussion of these approaches see Walker (1979).

Escape Interventions

If it has been established that an individual is attempting to avoid demands then the intervention to the non-compliance must be approached in a different form than if the non-compliance was caused by attention. For example time-out, ignoring and even physical

restraint allow the non-compliant individual to escape the demands and in so doing increases the possibility that the non-compliance will reoccur. Briefly described below are four interventions which have been shown to be effective methods of decreasing non-compliant behavior and also acceptable to state and local human subjects review committees.

Make the situation more enjoyable. By selecting new reinforcers the setting can become so enjoyable that the individual does not want to escape. An example of this approach is to move from 'M & M' candies to chocolate ice cream. Another method is to provide highly rewarding, i.e., positive interactions. This might be the telling of stories or provision of interesting sounds. It should be pointed out that these activities are interspersed with demand situations and do not replace requests. Further, these reinforcers have to be continually evaluated because they can satiate rapidly.

Behavioral task analysis. There are several approaches which fall into this category. The first is the use of task analysis to reduce the difficulty of the steps. In this manner compliance to requests can be built, based upon small steps. Once compliance is obtained the level of difficulty can be increased. The second method is similar to the first except the material presented is simplyfied but the size of the

task remains the same. An example of this is using a large shirt with big buttons initially and then gradually bringing the individual to criterion. The third approach, referred to as errorless learning (Gaylord-Ross, 1979) incorporates much of both of the preceeding methods. In this method the discrimination required is so simple that it is virtually impossible to make an error.

It should be noted that the overriding theory of this second approach is that the individual is attempting to escape the frustration of making mistakes. This may not be true in all cases on non-compliance.

Teaching communication. This approach provides the non-compliant person with an acceptable way of not complying. In this approach the individual is taught to respond in some manner that s/he can't or won't do what is expected of him/her. This response may be a sign, gesture, word, or noise. That signal must be understood by all those who work with the non-compliant person. The success of this approach may present new problems and levels of non-compliance. However, these problems can be dealt with much easier than aggressive or self-destructive behavior.

Escape extinction. This approach revolves around the concept that whatever the non-compliant individual does he/she will be required to complete the tasks. There are three methods which seem to be quite effective in reducing non-compliance. The first is the use of continued demand for a period of time. The only interaction is to request the

completion of the required activity. As with other forms of extinction the level of non-compliance will increase initially and then decrease. The second method has been referred to as 'the next thing that you do is what I ask' method. In this approach, much like the first, the individual is requested to comply and to make what follows contingent upon compliance. This may include eating, going home, or classroom activities which are enjoyable. The method also requires the individual to follow the routine of the day after compliance has been gained no matter when or how long the compliance takes. The third method is known as 'the two or three time rule'. After the initial request second and/or a third request is made. At that point the non-compliant individual is motored through the requested activity. These methods all tell the individual that he/she cannot non-comply and that the negative behavior has no payoff.

Boredom Interventions

The interventions to non-compliance caused by boredom are not complex nor difficult to implement. However, they do often differ with established teaching procedures used when criterion is not met. Decisions to use these interventions should be based on data indicators noted and their success or failure should also be closely observed.

Increased Difficulty. It has been estimated (White, note 1) that from 18 to 20 percent of all non-compliance can be solved by increasing

the difficulty of the task or moving to the next step in a series of behaviors. In this method instead of cutting back the difficulty of the requirement is increased.

Revise the Program. A major reason for boredom to occur may be the criterion used for graduation to the next step is unrealistic. Teachers often use 80 to 100 percent correct responses for a period of three days. These levels are often unrealistic or at least arbitrarily arrived at. In many cases a success level that is over chance, i.e., 67 percent, is quite adequate.

Other Alternatives. Other suggested revisions in the program includes changing the schedule for consequation of correct responses; the institution of a cost response procedure where incorrect responses are consequated; and the elimination of competing consequences. Any, or all of these procedures may aid the teacher or trainer in reaching criteria and enable the student to move on to new tasks.

Summary

Non-compliance is one of the major challenges faced by those working with the severely handicapped. Clearly non-compliance is more complex than was once thought. Instead of being totally an attention motivated phenomenon at least two other possible causes exist. The interventions for each of the causes are quite diverse and unique. The educator or

trainer must make accurate decisions based on observed behaviors in selection of appropriate interventions. The choise of an intervention based on false assumptions concerning the causation of the non-compliance can lead to the strengthening or increasing the behaviors which the parent or professional was attempting to eliminate.

Non-compliance must be lessened in many severely handicapped and autistic individuals if further learning is to take place. This end can be accomplished if interventions are planned, based upon observational data and the correct conclusions concerning causation are made.

Reference Note

1. White, O. Non-compliance. A presentation at the Association for the Severely Handicapped National Conference. New York, October 1981.

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Figure 1

Attention Seeking Behavior

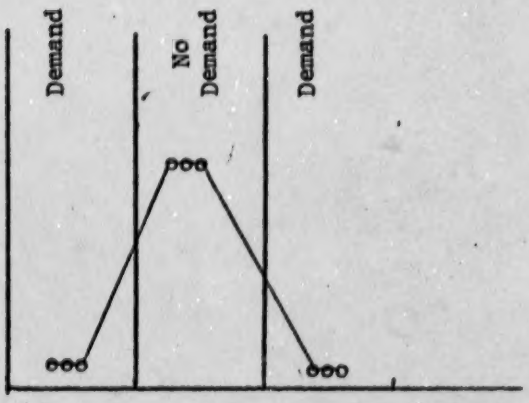

Figure 2

Escape - Non-Compliance

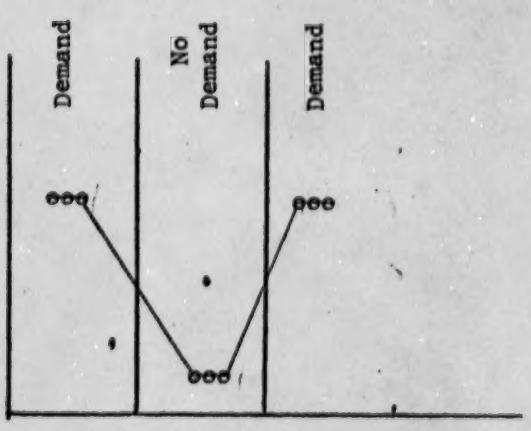

Figure 3

Boredom Caused Non-Compliance

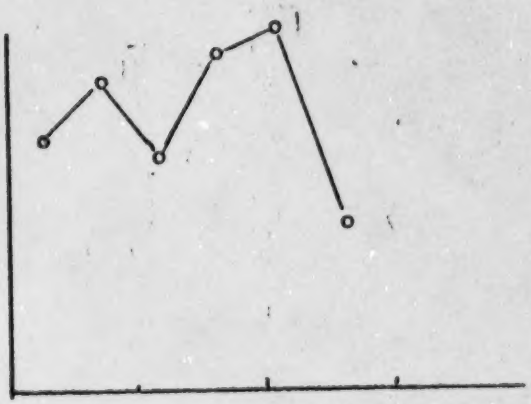

Figure 4

Boredom Caused Non-Compliance